In the Classroom/En classe

Folklore, Literature, Ethnography, and Second-Language Acquisition: Teaching Culture in the ESL Classroom

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Recognizing that to learn about culture will aid the new Canadian in attaining cultural awareness, this article argues that it is imperative to develop strategies for teaching about culture. Using folklore as a critical methodology in the ESL classroom is such a strategy. Because folklore is an intrinsic part of everyday life, its use promotes and enables cross-cultural understandings and the understandings of North American cultures. Moreover, through the use of folklore, students and instructors come to recognize that their expectations are mutable or living elements of culture.

Sachant que l'acquisition de connaissances culturelles aidera les nouveaux Canadiens à développer une sensibilisation culturelle, nous proposons qu'il est indispensable de créer des stratégies pour enseigner la culture. Le recours au folklore dans la salle de classe d'ALS constitue une méthodologie critique possible. Le folklore faisant partie intégrante de la vie quotidienne, l'emploi qu'on en fait en salle de classe favorise et rend possible les connaissances transculturelles et l'apprentissage de cultures nord-américaines. De plus, l'enseignement du folklore développe chez les étudiants et les enseignants la conscience que leurs attentes sont des éléments mutables organiques de la culture.

Sitting in a discussion session, we hear for the umpteenth time, "All Canadian and American women are bold;" "Children here [in North America] are disrespectful;" "Family is not strong, not valued." "Why are you like that here?" And suddenly, once again, we realize it doesn't matter whether the class is composed of one nationality or several. ESL classes need us to interpret stereotypes of our culture that are perpetuated in popular media, because that is their perception of North American culture. But this time we wonder, "How can we reach them? How can we show them "we," North Americans, are no more a stereotype than "they" [Chinese, Malaysians, Indians, Africans] are?" (Gholson & Stumpf, 1996).

The first task a new Canadian must perform is to acquire a new language: English. However, learning to survive linguistically is not enough. Just as new language acquisition is important, so too is the development of cultural awareness imperative. Indeed, the two go hand in hand; with the development of cultural awareness the understanding of the spoken language deepens. Only when one understands a country's culture is one fully able to participate in that culture. Therefore, not only does learning about culture aid new Canadians in attaining cultural awareness, it also promotes intercultural adjustment.

Trained in the fields of folklore, English, and English as a second language (ESL) and acting as instructors of graduate ESL students, we believe it is imperative that a strategy for teaching about culture in the classroom be developed. Such teaching requires that students' voices, their personal cultural knowledge, and their recently acquired knowledge of North American culture[s] be foregrounded. If they are not, appropriation of the students' cultures may occur. This happens when the instructor, having researched a particular student's culture, presents what he or she has learned about the culture in discussion before asking the student to speak about his or her culture. This instructor-centered presentation of material often then influences the discussion of culture when (a) the student is put on the defensive because he or she feels the need to justify or explain why something is as it is, or (b) the presentation itself determines the general direction in which the discussion will move (Fecho, 2004). Moreover, in an effort to avoid potential conflict between opposing views, the instructor may steer the discussion about one culture so as to avoid discomfort. Often the cultural perspective then validated is that most familiar to the teacher and least threatening to the teacher's authority in the classroom, which leads to an ethnocentric classroom perspective (Fecho, 2004; Herrera & Murray, 2005). This in turn can send the message that the avoided aspect of the student's culture is somehow wrong. In short, this manner of addressing cultural awareness is teacher-centered, not student-centered, with the teacher determining those skills the student needs to learn to become a part of the target culture and those aspects of each student's culture to be discussed. This unbalanced and unintentionally devaluing approach can leave students out of the true learning process, engaged in cultural monologue rather than cultural dialogue.

If we wish our students to see beyond their stereotype of North American cultures, we need to see beyond our own stereotypes of their cultures. To do this we need to create a cultural dialogue. Through cultural dialogue, interpersonal adjustment skills from the first culture can be adapted for the new culture, and skills learned in the new culture can negotiate a place in the first culture.

Through experiences such as that opening this article, we have ascertained that folklore can be used as a critical methodology in the ESL class-

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room to create this cultural dialogue. Through the use of folklore, a cultural dialogue can be created that is built on respect for differences as well as acknowledgment of similarities. Because folklore is an intrinsic part of everyday life, it promotes and enables cross-cultural understandings and understandings of North American culture. These understandings are promoted through the identification of the folklore in the narratives used in the classroom and the simultaneous identification of this same folklore in the student's culture. Once a similarity between two or more cultures is found, students are guided toward an awareness of their own cultural expectations, how these expectations are based in informally transmitted knowledge, and how expectations are related to the narratives that represent Canadian culture as discussed in class. Moreover, as a result of this approach, the students and the instructors recognize that their expectations are mutable, living elements of culture. For as culture is continually changing, individuals must learn not only to recognize and value similarities and differences between cultures, but also that their awareness of any culture is never complete.

The following discussion outlines how to create a cultural dialogue. To do this we (a) identify or discuss culture; (b) discuss what is meant by traditional culture/folklore; (c) determine which skills are employed both in ethnographic research and the daily interaction of ESL instructors and students; and (d) provide a five-step process from our own classroom experience that illustrates a balanced cultural dialogue.

What is Culture? Folklore Studies

Approached from a number of disciplinary perspectives, the definition of culture is problematic. Recognizing the difficulty inherent in defining culture, Williams (1976) discusses the various meanings of the word *culture*. He concludes that this is one "of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" in part because of its historical development and in part because "it has now become to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought" (pp. 76-77). Williams continues with a discussion of the various uses of the word and its history, concluding that

> We have to recognize three broad active categories of usage (i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development ... (ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group ... (iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic society.... It is clear that, within a discipline, conceptual usage has to be clarified. But in general it is the range and overlap of meanings that is significant. (pp. 80-81)

Culture, then, if we combine the three general uses identified by Williams (1976), is the act of physical, spiritual, emotional, social, or artistic living in a large or general community setting. Furthermore, culture can be recognized as existing on a series of sublevels as in the larger community many smaller communities center on various activities (such as work) and places (such as home and school).

Based on this definition, teaching about culture involves not only the knowledge and skills needed to survive in mainstream culture, but also the knowledge and skills needed to negotiate subcultures. This is particularly important because there is no single Canadian or United States culture. As multicultural societies, what is Canadian or American is often the ability to speak English and to interact cross-culturally or cross-regionally. Thus although our article focuses on Canadian culture and its interpretations, our method is applicable in classrooms across North America.

The text chosen to teach about North American culture thus needs to reflect this multicultural North American reality. It must encompass issues of ethnicity, gender, color, and nationalism. It is also imperative that the text be *authentic* from a folklore perspective, as folklore is the study of informal culture that emphasizes two key ideas: (a) members of a group that participate in a tradition are the experts in that tradition, and (b) any individual's or group's belief system should be respected as valid. Folklore studies emphasizes that only members of a group know the traditions of that group because traditional culture is learned through face-to-face interaction: observations, repetition, and imitation, over time. Therefore, to ascertain a text's authenticity, certain questions must be asked for specific reasons.

1. If the main character is a member of a minority, is the text written by a member of that minority? This is important because nonmembers can portray a culture vividly, yet sometimes inaccurately. An author who is a member of the portrayed group has been steeped in the traditions, the folklore of that group, through traditional means.

2. Is the character well rounded and free from stereotype? Answering this question may require work from the instructor, who will need to compare the text with personal knowledge of cultural stereotypes and with any other stereotypes offered by students during discussion.

3. Is there an appropriation of voice? According to folklore studies, authors may appropriate a voice when writing about a culture not their own. This appropriation may be validated by the culture being portrayed and so still be considered a valid text.

Answers should reveal that the validity of the text is not questionable and that cultural elements are not artificial constructions of folk elements[1] attributed to a specific group, as perceived by the writer who is from outside of that culture. Authentic texts also reduce the number of research hours required to verify voice and cultural details of the text. Moreover, authentic

texts are preferred texts because they give voice to a person who is in and of a culture, yet also marginalized in that same culture. Opening discussion to the marginalized voice offers a chance to model a balanced cultural dialogue, thus allowing students to feel comfortable offering their own voice in this new cultural environment.

As folklore studies informs text choices and aids in defining valid cultural presentations in literature, we believe that applications of the ethnographic process also inform our instructional methodology and its outcomes. The skills employed in ethnographic research are the same as those employed in the daily interactions of ESL instructors and students. For example, the ESL teacher, like the ethnographer, continually aspires to sublimate personal beliefs and world views while creating an open environment for the documentation of others' beliefs and cultural views, thus fostering discussion. In our ESL classroom the blending of disciplinary methodologies for cultural study (ethnology, folklore, and language) evolved into a balanced instructional strategy that built cultural skills of observation, analysis (of self and cultures), detailed oral description, and the written word.

In most North American K-12 teaching settings, the term *ethnographic inquiry*, by which we mean writing or reading about culture without being trained in conscious observation of beliefs or personal traditions, now denotes a broad approach to documentation exemplified by Simons (1990), where culture is reported in the classroom.[2] In such classrooms students are asked to document an aspect of their surrounding culture, associating class studies with life experiences while introducing students to basic concepts like research ethics, semiotics, the power of word choice, or even the applicability of a method across genres.

Although there is no current theory[3] in the areas of either folklore/folklife in education or folklore/folklife in second-language acquisition, there is a natural fit. For example, in the ESL classroom the instructor frequently researches local culture and similarities between his or her students' cultures in order to provide comparisons or explanations of cultural differences and to build bridges between cultures. This approach, although laudable, often denies[4] students opportunities to recognize and offer their own understandings of how they believe their cultures can be bridged with the new culture.

Benefits of Literature, Folklore, and Ethnographic Skills
Using ethnographic skills, students encounter other cultural perspectives on their own terms, both in text and in students' conversations. They also become aware of how their own values and beliefs are shaped through the use of a folklore-centered methodology. In addition, they become aware of the underlying similarities that exist between all cultures and cultural texts.[5] These similarities are the folklore—folk beliefs, common folk motifs, per-

sonal experience narratives, the use of riddles—that build connections between cultures.

By beginning with connections to the familiar and by exploring how these connections translate into the unfamiliar, it is then possible for the student to begin to move on to unfamiliar world views, discuss them, and learn about them. This allows the students to break through their ethnocentric boundaries and to begin to see how cultural identities are constructed and perpetuated.

It is through this identification of folk elements present in English literature and the identification of these same elements in the reader's culture that the discussion of folklore, as well as its inter- and intracultural roles occur (Ringbaum, 1987). Similarly, second-language acquisition approaches such as communicative language teaching and schema theory also stress the importance of social cultural context in the teaching and learning of a second language (Stern, 1981) or the importance of background knowledge and comprehension (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988).

Our ESL Classroom

In winter 1996 an ESL Listening through Canadian Short Stories course at Memorial University of Newfoundland was created in response to students' requests. Offered on a trial basis in the winter semester of 1996, the course was funded by the university in summer 1997. It was then made an official part of the program and has continued to be offered when needed.

Each session group was subdivided into two six-to-nine-member groups in which an educator facilitated discussion. Discussion groups were run simultaneously so that the instructors could meet beforehand to brainstorm topics for the day, and afterward for an evaluation of these topics. Discussion centered on short stories (5-7 pages) written by Canadian authors and collected in Adamowski's (1994) text *Canadian Stories: A Cultural Reader for ESL Students*. Included in the text is general information about authors' biographical background and a glossary of unfamiliar terms. Although some background information was provided by the text, we supplied accounts of national history and the economics of the province in which each short story was located.

The course was instructed by us, two graduate students in English and folklore, one American and one Canadian. The course sections comprised graduate students from Indonesia, China, Chile, India, and Korea. Gender composition included two women, the female educators, and approximately 22 men. Such diverse class composition facilitated discussion and often placed participants face to face with their own previously unrecognized cultural and scholastic biases.

Anticipating face-to-face discussions on potentially emotional topics, we not only discussed with our students how the course would be formatted in

the beginning class, but also our own working and personal relationship. In short, we hoped that if we were willing to share our cultural differences, then they would be willing to point out differences between Canadian and their own cultures. Explanation occurred throughout, using self-disclosure and cultural asides. For us as educators, self-disclosure further entailed illustrating character motivation and narrative themes in the text through the use of personal experience narratives that centered on both our and friends' experiences living in foreign cultures such as Hong Kong, France, and Canada; adjusting to regional differences as we relocated; our experiences learning and using a second language; and our experiences in Newfoundland. Cultural asides occurred slightly less frequently and were often intrinsically linked to our use of humor in the classroom. Freely teasing each other—about national characteristics, approaches to the world, and use of language—often led to explication of cultural levels of discourse, national stereotyping, and popular beliefs.

This personalizing of topics served to create an informal atmosphere where teasing, jokes, and self-disclosure also occurred among the students. The informal atmosphere was also created by the voluntary nature of the course: the students attended because they wished to be there. For the most part, students seemed to enter the course at the second stage of cultural awareness/intercultural adjustment skills outlined in the University of Saskatchewan's (1995) *TESL Theory and Skills Development Course Guide*. They entered the classroom already recognizing the existence and influence of their own cultural group and the existence of other cultures (Stage one), and they had attached value judgments to the perceived similarities and differences between their primary culture and Canadian culture (Stage two). We hoped that attainment of integration/ethnocentrism, the point at which one chooses either to solidify a monocultural view or begin to think and act biculturally (stage three), or transcendence: when individuals are able to value and appreciate their own cultural roots, other cultures, and see the "individual strengths and weaknesses of any culture, and search for universals while valuing the vitality and variety of the earth's cultures" (Stage four) (*TESL* 1995: Module 6)—would be facilitated through our methodology.

The Five-Step Method

How the identification of folklore and the use of ethnographic skills aided the students' passage through cultural awareness/intercultural adjustment is best illustrated through the lesson planning and class discussion that took place in association with Taien Ng's "Shun-Wai" (Adamowski, 1994). Read at mid-semester, this story introduced to us the need to recognize a previously unidentified fifth level of cultural adjustment.

According to the story's introduction,

Shun-Wai is Chinese for "Spirit Place" a special shrine where Chinese traditionally remember their ancestors. This custom, sometimes called ancestor worship, is no longer common in China, but the custom of having a shrine has been kept by some of the elderly in Hong Kong.
In this story the narrator watches her Canadian mother, who is a Christian, criticize her Hong Kong grandparents who have Shun-Wai.
(Adamowski, 1994, p. 53)

Although the introduction continues to ask questions that the reader should attempt to answer, the suggested questions are open-ended, thus creating a need for Step one, pre-class preparation.

Step One

Step one included identifying folklore in the texts and noting how it was used in the story and in relation to the list of questions in the text. As instructors, we read the text, noting any traditions that seemed connected to the main group or the individual group member portrayed in the story. On finishing the story, we would then consider how the listed items added to or detracted from an understanding of the group or individual group member depicted in the themes of the story. Last, we would review the supplied discussion questions to identify those that allowed the opportunity for discussion of folklore.

Traditions are usually specific to members of a group (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality, gender) and generally are part of marking group membership as well as the four universal life stages[6]: birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. Some examples would include, but not be limited to, traditions that mark the seasons for a group such as customary holiday events or food (Christmas dinner or Chinese New Year celebrations); birth celebrations and beliefs (baptisms, baby showers, brises); coming of age (Sweet 16 party, bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah); marriage (bridal showers, doe and stag parties, divorce parties, anniversary celebrations); sickness and death (folk beliefs: acupuncture, traditional medicine, or divination; burial practices: covering a mirror, stopping a clock, wearing black, wakes, decorations on a grave site). Groups also identify themselves through the traditional items they make and wear and the stories they tell.

In the "Shun-Wai" story, several cultural traditions or folklore are mentioned from the perspective of an individual group member, the Chinese-Canadian granddaughter. Obvious traditions or informal knowledge mentioned in the story include the girl being identified as *gwua-mui* (white girl) by her mother, a status further emphasized by her vegetarianism. When the girl and her mother return home to Hong Kong, the tradition of saying a Christian prayer before the meal marks the mother as an outsider to her family. The final traditions of the story include the Shun-Wai and the difference between North American and Chinese food choices.

Step Two

Step two involved identifying plausible reactions of students to the texts. Although not every student's reaction can be determined, this groundwork helps the teacher prepare for possible discussions and reactions and anticipate potential areas of cultural conflict or concern. To do this an instructor must consider the cultural examples in the text and whether students will be familiar with reasons for their use or the history behind their use. Also, the instructor must consider the students' backgrounds and cultures. For example, in reference to this story, does the student come from a culture that is familiar with Christian sects such as Catholicism or Protestantism and their beliefs and/or traditions? What are the gender roles in their homeland? What is their home culture's view of how youths interact with old people? To prepare for this the instructor must have a base knowledge of folklore,[7] cultural themes in the text, and each student's culture. We did this in two ways.

First, we asked students to teach the group about themselves and their cultures. At the same time, other students were encouraged to ask clarification questions or to add additional information. In essence this was an exercise in creating mini-oral ethnographies.[8] This exercise initiated the course as a student-centered learning environment where students' knowledge and interpretations of the world would be valued. The following points were covered.

1. The identification of cultures represented in the classroom.
2. Brief research on the major religions represented by course members.
3. Brief documentation of gender roles and social assumptions of the represented cultures' majority group(s).
4. Notes identifying how each of these perspectives differs from the general North American views of gender, religion, and group interaction.

The instructors made folders for each culture represented by the students in the class, and this information helped us to contribute questions. These mini-ethnographies, the class questions, and responses gave us direction for determining productive research to supplement both the course and our knowledge of global cultures.

Taking notes on students' mini-ethnographies and placing these notes in the folder was the beginning of the second approach to creating our foundation of cultural knowledge. Reviewing our notes for new or unfamiliar information or references led to a list of research areas, which we divided between us and pursued. One example would be a student mentioning that his home culture had a term for people who lived "too long" in the West. In India, individuals returning might be called *apples* because they smile too much, too widely, and have picked up White traits that, like an apple, are held in a yellow skin. The mention of this led us to inquire from past students

and fellow instructors whether they knew if such terms existed for other cultures represented in our class. The additional terms were added to appropriate folders.

Updating the folders was an exercise that continued throughout the course. In fact the leveling structure of beginning each discussion session with an open floor—asking students for their interpretation of the story, how the story differed from how it might be told in another country, what students failed to understand about the story—allowed us to listen for clues about differences between students' cultural expectations and to note them.

Adding information about these differences to the folders created a resource that was invaluable when we prepared to discuss cultural differences and to contrast literary portrayals of culture with students' cultural knowledge. Further, the collection of and referral to these resources served to bring students' knowledge to the forefront throughout the lesson planning. Predominantly, collecting this information helped us prepare: (a) to compare information about a culture known by a student with folklore or cultural portrayals in the story; (b) to create a list of questions based on the identified similarities and differences between classroom, text, and instructors' cultures during the previous process; and (c) to create a list of questions that ask student(s) for more knowledge about their home cultures.

Step Three

Step three involved teaching folklore terms and reinforcing these terms through modeling. The term *folklore* was defined as things learned informally such as stories, recipes, and songs. *Folk practices* were defined as traditional activities such as how we create home altars and participate in festivals or other celebrations (for further information, see glossary). Next we used the folklore terms in every class to enable students to identify practices, and we modeled discussion of belief systems. Although belief systems govern how we live and interact with the world, the component parts of belief systems may be oppositional. For example, one may be Catholic and believe in abortion or be ethnically Jewish but not practice Judaism or circumcision.

Because the terms are not tied to any particular culture in the classroom, the use of such terminology and its modeling[9] by instructor(s) allows for a leveling of differences and the creation of neutral ground. Defining belief systems and modeling discussions of beliefs through stories based on the experience of instructors in the new country helped students recognize that one individual's held beliefs[10] may be contradictory and that members of the same group may hold contradictory beliefs. For example, family members may all understand what a Shun-Wai is composed of, where it would be placed in a home, and why people would create one, yet still disagree on whether a Shun-Wai should appear in their home. An obvious application of these facts appears in the Shun-Wai short story.

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A conflicting belief is illustrated when the daughter who immigrated to Canada and became Christian returns home. On her return she reacts to her parents having a Shun-Wai in their home. This conflict in belief systems in conjunction with the classroom's neutral ground allowed individual students to express divergent opinions in spite of their Chinese classmates' possible negative reactions.

Step Four

Step four involved playing on student expectations. We began textual discussion with an open floor; students were asked to express their feelings about the text using folklore terminology. Using open-ended questions (What in the text bothered you? What did you think of *insert character name*? Would this happen in your culture? Can you think of a similar event in your culture or life experience?) allowed multiple interpretations to be heard and discussed; no single interpretation was privileged over others. In addition, various participants' experiences were linked to the text, and these interpretations were recognized as equally valid.

However, such emphasis also validated Canadian culture. Canadian culture has ways of dealing with controversial topic matter just as students' cultures do. Again, this realization was encouraged through open-ended questioning that required students to supply personal life or culture experiences similar to those in the text. When the students offered a personal experience, we asked questions that would reveal the folk knowledge behind the opinions. This is when the folklore was identified. This information may be consciously developed by class participations as in a discussion of foodways and when or why food holds cultural meaning, or it may not. Questions written in preparation for discussion of the Shun-Wai story included: (a) Does food tell us anything about the characters? (b) What does food tell us about the mother-daughter relationship? The daughter's self perception? (c) Why is it important that the waitresses always talk to the daughter in English? (d) Why does the daughter visit Chinatown after she returns to Canada? (e) What does the mother's saying grace and her parents' response show us about the mother and their opinion of her?

Step Five, Secondary Transcendence

In Step five, analysis of the cultural content of the text and divergent views expressed about it occurred. As a result of our analysis, post-class considerations of the Shun-Wai short story and our personal application of the folklore-ESL approach appeared to invoke an additional level of intercultural adjustment, which we term *secondary transcendence*.

The story "Shun-Wai" by Taien Ng was used late in the semester, so both educators and ESL students brought what we felt was a stage-four understanding of culture to this story. Most important, the ESL students conscious-

ly discussed the narrative using the terms *belief system, folklore,* and *folk practice* to explain what was happening in the story. This has particular relevance as the story takes place in Hong Kong, and discussion of character motivation required Chinese students to explicate their birth culture to their peers and educators. Furthermore, the main character and narrator is a first-generation Canadian of Chinese heritage, and conflict occurs between the behavior of the mother (new Canadian) on her return home to visit her parents and her viewing of the parents' material expression of their folk beliefs: the Shun-Wai.

The initial class response based on our understanding of the emphasis in Chinese culture on generational respect was shock because of the irreverent way the mother behaved. This behavior was contradictory to our perception of how Chinese people view their elders: that is, with great respect and even subservience. The non-Chinese class members' and educators' response to the behavior of the mother was accusatory: How could she behave like this? How could her parents let her behave this way without saying anything? Such an attitude could have helped the discussion fall into an *us* versus *them* scenario, but because the Chinese students explicated the behavior using folkloric terms, the attitude of the class changed. Chinese students indicated that the belief systems of the daughter and parents had diverged. The daughter now saw her parents' Shun-Wai as a folk tradition. Potential in-class conflict[11] was avoided through recognition of shared understanding based on respect and a shared knowledge of the folklore terms used by their peers. As a result, the Chinese students felt comfortable enough to respond to intimate and challenging questions[12] from their peers and teachers in an attempt to reconcile unfamiliar behaviors with their own world views and their own possible reactions in similar situations.

From a folklore perspective, the only individuals who truly know and understand the aspects of culture that are taught orally or through imitation and observation are members of that culture. This pedagogical process brings to the forefront the knowledge of class members who are part of the culture being discussed; it levels the innate hierarchical structures of the classroom, demonstrating that researching other traditions is good practice and that asking for information from individuals who are of the culture is valuable. Students are given the freedom to ask questions, to correct the instructor and their peers. The use of folklore terms allows the instructor to deflate emotional discussions through the reminder that all belief systems are valuable.

For example, Chinese students used self-disclosure to effect understanding. They noted behavioral and physical changes that their families might recognize, but not react to, on their own return to China. Weight gain, [perceived] change in facial muscle caused by speaking English, and change in behavior from a conciliatory to assertive Western nature were all men-

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tioned. The students were even comfortable enough to include information about stereotypes attached to individuals educated or living in the West who have assumed westernisms and the term *banana*, used to describe them.

However, during our after-class discussion, we discovered that although the in-class discussion had been lively and open between the students, we the educators had each felt a sense of unease. We were both stressed and shocked that we had reacted so strongly to the Chinese grandparents' passive reaction to their Christian daughter's destruction of the Shun-Wai. On reflection we realized that our mutual unease was based on our perception of the story's presentation of Anglo culture through the guise of Christianity. We both further recognized that we had taken offence at this presentation. Understanding the Chinese students' explanations, we realized that we had misperceived the intent or message of the text because of our lack of knowledge about cultural beliefs. As well, we had through lack of experience misperceived the role and tasks a new Canadian faces as he or she attempts to bridge two divergent cultures.

Conclusion

The pedagogical method that we developed for our ESL classroom is folkloric in approach, using questions that attempt to discern attitudes toward a group's beliefs and/or traditions, as well as foregrounding knowledge held by group members (both instructors' and students') during discussion and interpretation of stories. The aim of these questions is to promote understanding between the groups in a classroom and to do so without didacticism. A secondary aim is to enable the students to recognize and challenge their own schema. Through the use of questions that elicit information and challenge the students to examine their first responses and their cultural assumptions to the narratives, themes, and ideas under discussion, the intricacies of cultural discourse are introduced. In other words, questions and discussion are always dependant on the text. However, the important factor is that the manner of questioning as well as subject matter highlighted by questions and discussion be informed by research-supported knowledge of folklore or traditional culture themes in a text, of belief systems, and of the importance of group members' knowledge.

As well, we offered the students an alternate means to gain access to ethnographic information for classroom use. Rather than having students provide examples of daily cultural interaction, we used texts that highlight cultural interaction to elicit discussion of experiences from memory and to view those experiences through a new frame of reference.

We practiced the same process ourselves. Suddenly facing our misperceptions and the previously unknown limits of our schema was disquieting. We thought we were liberal individuals open to and accepting of new cultures. We had both experienced individuals who were not so liberal and smugly

felt that we would not succumb to passing judgments about others based on their cultural behavior. However, long-buried world views reasserted themselves, suggesting to us a level of understanding we refer to as secondary transcendence, in which individuals recognize their own limitations in cultural understanding.

We believe that this revelatory experience was possible only through the introduction of a folklore-based questioning methodology and folklore terms. ESL and folklore methodology are already similar in that both use questions that attempt to discern attitudes toward a group's beliefs and traditions to promote understanding between the groups in a classroom. Folklore, therefore, can be a method for promoting a comfortable classroom when using a paradigm through which the acquisition of new second-language vocabulary (its connotations and denotations), new academic terms (stereotype, belief system, folk practice), cultural situations (relationship, gender roles), and understood, although not named, cultural ideals (world view) can be recognized.

Notes

[1]Folklore terms such as *folk knowledge* that are italicized in the text are also defined in the glossary at the end of this article.

[2]Discussion of this approach to ethnography in the classroom recently occurred between ESL instructors Haneda (2002) and Ilieva (2001).

[3]Although no theoretical models exist, applied frameworks for folklore in education were first introduced by MacDowell (1987) as she established tradition as a means for students to gain entrance to academic subjects. Relevant theoretical models do, however, exist in both education (Sunstein, 1994) and art education (Congdon, 2004). Most relevant is the work of educational theorist John Dewey, who posited the progressive education movement and whose theoretical approach informs key texts in this area such as Simon's (1990) *Student Worlds, Student Words*.

[4]Instructors have generally presented their research as truth in the classroom and only subsequently invited discussion. In fact it would be better to allow the student to speak first, thereby reinforcing the importance of first-hand knowledge.

[5]In response to Peck's (1991) concerns as expressed in "Recognizing and Meeting the Needs of ESL Students," we attempted to maintain an egalitarian approach to the presentation and discussion of literature and cultures.

[6]The four life stages mentioned here are derived from Van Gennep's (1960) list in *The Rites of Passage*. His seminal discussion of these life stages marks their relevance to religious belief by noting that "progression from one [stage] to the next is accompanied by special acts ... ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position [i.e., life stage] to another" (p. 3).

[7]A base knowledge of folklore indicates an understanding of informal communication, the role of belief systems, and the importance of forefronting a group member's knowledge of his or her culture's informal knowledge, as well as the recognition that much of this informal knowledge appears either reinterpreted by authors or reported by authors who are folklorists and group members in literature. Further introduction to these concepts is readily accessible in Shoemaker's (1990) introductory text.

[8]This was an ongoing process as the students added to this mini-ethnography in response to the varying cultural content of each story.

[9]Our modeling consisted of telling personal stories that related how we had to think about and think through similar experiences or cultural differences we had encountered during teaching and travels. At other times, one of us would ask the other about his or her home culture and how this culture would treat elders, for example, then respond by comparing these facts with our own culture. Such discussions modeled expectations associated with sensitive issues, appropriate questions, and forming appropriate responses.

[10]From this point forward the use of the term *belief* indicates both elements of a belief system, belief and disbelief.

[11]One hazard here can be idealized perspectives of the student's own culture and/or idealized views of North American culture. When students bring such perspectives to the classroom, they can divert class discussion by adamantly refuting the views of their instructor and peers. Stereotype can be used to break open these discussion deadlocks. The instructor can reveal that any position, if posited adamantly enough by several people, can become a stereotype that some will hold as undeniably true. If a student is unable to move beyond his or her position, the strength of this pedagogy is that he or she will have had the skills or tools for cultural adjustment modeled for them and be able to work past this level of cultural adjustment when ready at a later date.

[12]Although this may sound as if students are on trial, this is why research is necessary, to identify and then prepare for potential hot spots being interrogated. Moreover, offering students a reinterpreted definition of stereotype—views applied by outsiders to groups of people whose majority share traits or beliefs although individual members may or may not share the beliefs or possess the identified group trait—results in the modeling of one way to understand and process individuals who do not share their advanced level of cultural adjustment skills.

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Glossary

Belief: Beliefs are convictions or acceptances that something is true.

Belief system: A belief system is composed of one person's beliefs and disbeliefs.

Custom: Customs are "traditional or habitual forms of behavior within a particular culture group. It is behavior that is required and often expected within certain cases" (Shoemaker, 1990, p. 233).

Disbeliefs: Disbeliefs are convictions or acceptances that something is false.

Folk beliefs: "Are beliefs that members of a folk group hold because they are members of the group. They are also traditional beliefs; that is they are beliefs that are circulated by word of mouth or observation and imitation and, as a result of this circulation, undergo change" (Shoemaker, 1990, p. 234).

Folk group: Any group of three or more people who share knowledge of folklore is considered a folk group.

Folk knowledge: Is knowledge "that members of a folk group hold because they are members of the group. It is traditional"; that is, it is knowledge that "is circulated by word of mouth or observation and imitation and, as a result of this circulation, undergo change" (Shoemaker, 1990, p. 234).

Folk motifs: The smallest meaningful component or theme of a story, design, or customary event.

Folk practice: A custom or piece of folklore that is a common activity of a folk group is a practice of a folk group and its members.

Folklore: Folklore is the study of culture and artistic expression in small groups and the items studied: customs, beliefs, narratives, food, song, and material culture.

Foodways: Foodways refers to the "study of actual recipes and ingredients, but also inquires into the social uses of food and food preparation, the customs surrounding special foods, and the symbolic importance of particular types of food" (Shoemaker, 1990, p. 235).

Material culture: Refers to products of traditional culture that are three dimensional such as art, crafts, architecture, and foods.

Personal experience narratives: These narratives are "a first person narrative[s] based on a real incident in the life of the teller. Its worthiness is recognized by the teller who then the combines experience, its perception and context to form a self contained narrative. These stories are steeped in the teller's ethical code. The personal values of the teller influence her/his perception of the incident as well" (Shoemaker, 1990, p. 238).

Stereotype: Stereotypes are perceptions outsiders apply to groups of people who may or may not share the same beliefs but which are based upon beliefs the majority of group members share. Because stereotypes are based in one group's beliefs and disbeliefs concerning another group, they can reveal much about belief systems.

World view: "The system of values, attitudes, and beliefs that provides a person's fundamental understanding of the way the world works; world view is closely related to what we call common sense [for individuals]" (Shoemaker, 1990, p. 241). The term may also be used to indicate the same beliefs at the level of culture. At this level world view is a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs that are accepted by the majority of a culture's members; in this instance world view is closely tied to what we call cultural ideals.